

May Be Farm Happenings

February 2020

Happenings on the Farm

February is the longest month. Lambing starts in March and there are 1,001 things to get done before the babies come. It's odd how there seems to be too little time to get everything done but the month takes forever to end. The month starts with me giving the ewes their annual booster shots. Read my article "Vaccinations to give or not to give?" later in the newsletter to find out why we give shots and which shots are important.

Another big task on February's to-do list is to get the lambing jugs set up. Babies come on their own schedule and they love to play "surprise the shepherd". So instead of scrambling around panicking, trying to find where the parts and pieces went (even though you put them away where they belonged last year, they sometimes mysteriously migrate, especially when you need them right now) and get everything assembled while the mom is demanding her special after lamb dinner and the lamb is wandering around looking for some trouble to get into. This year I want to do a little construction work and put fancy hinges on my jug panels. I've been drooling over the custom made ones I've seen and finally found a place that makes them for a reasonable price! I'm looking forward to having properly attached panels that aren't tied together with bailing twine.

As well as attaching hinges to my panels, it's getting to the point I need to build another feeder for my ewes. Their bellies are getting too fat to squeeze into the two feeders I currently have, so I've been using buckets. The problem is they tip the buckets over and waste the hay, then complain they are hungry. So I'm going to add another 8 or so feet of feeder space which should give everyone plenty of room at the dinner table.

In between construction work I want to take advantage of the niceish weather to do a deep spring cleaning of my barn. I want to strip all the bedding from the indoor and outdoor pens and refresh it so it will be new for the babies. I also want to move all the feed bins back to where they go, clean out the tack room, do an inventory of my barn equipment, repair equipment, get rid of stuff I no longer need and generally make the barn neat. I always wait for good weather to do this because I raise a lot of dust while cleaning and it's nice to open the barn doors and let it flow out. One of my goals this year is to make a place for everything. It's a lot easier to find your equipment if it gets put away and it's easier to put away tools if there is a place to put it. So I'm going to be proactive and make places for things to go. I may get a little carried away and borrow Dad's label maker and label spots. In any case, everything will be neat and tidy by the time the lambs come which will make my life a lot easier.

On the Needles

When the weather gets a little cool I wear a flannel shirt. It is comfortable and very durable for working on the farm but it's cotton. This year I've decided I'm going to create one from my own wool! It seems a fairly straight forward task, weave fabric and sew a shirt right? Nope. I quickly discovered that weaving involves some rocket science level math and a lot of decisions need to be made up front. The first thing is you need to know is what you want your finished product to look like. I know I want a semi fitted button up shirt in a plaid design.

The next step is to choose the pattern for the shirt. I need to do this now because I need to know how many yards of finished fabric I'll need. The yardage depends on the width of the fabric, so I'll need to be careful what loom I use. I chose this pattern



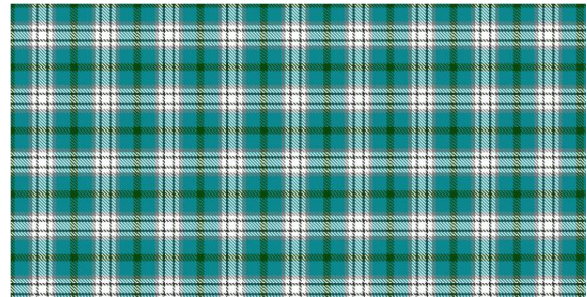
which will take 3 yards of fabric at 36 inches width which I can do on my loom.

Now I know my finished fabric length. Now I need to figure out what my fulling shrinkage is since I want a felted fabric. My weaving test piece shows that it

shrinks .025 inches for every original inch in the width and .2 inches for every inch in the original length. This means I now need to weave a piece that is 37 inches wide and 3.6 yards long.

Next I need to determine the loom shrinkage. General rule of thumb says that you will lose 10% but to make sure I'll have enough fabric I'm going to add 15%. So my new measurements will be 43 inches wide and 4.14 yard long.

Now I need to decide what my plaid will look like. There is a neat program that you can use to design your plaid called Plaid Maker. Here is my plaid design for my shirt.



Here comes the fun part. I can now calculate how many yards of yarn I need for my warp and weft. To do this I need to determine one last measurement, how many ends per inch my sett will be. This is pretty easy to do. You just carefully wrap the yarn around a ruler until you have 1 inch worth of wraps. It is important to do this somewhat loosely so that each wrap is just barely touching the one before. If you cram them onto the ruler you will end up with your sett too dense for the yarn. Once you have loosely wrapped the yarn you count the number of wraps (in this case 16) and divide by 2 to get your of 8 ends per inch.

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Feburary 2020

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1 Plant test plot
2	3	4	5	6	7	8 Pre-lambing vaccinations
9	10	11	12	13	14 Valentines Day	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

List of Events:

Feburary 1st plant test plot of new pasture plants

Feburary 8th Pre-lambing vaccinations for Ewes

March 6th Lambing Starts

March 21st Spring on the Farm – come visit the lambs!

March 28th Spinning with Intent – Getting to know you 9-1 at DFA

March 29th Shearing at Mae Be Farm

Sudoku

3		2	6		1		8	5
7		6	2	3		4	6	
				4	5			
8			9	7		2	3	
				2	3	1		9
					6		4	
9	1	8				5		
	7			1	9		2	
	2	4		8		9		3

Answer to last month's riddle: 5 cows, 1 pig, and 94 chickens!

All Riddled Up

I run all around the pasture or field but never move. What Am I?

Love to Laugh

My wife got 8 out of 10 on her driving test. The other two jumped out of the way.

Why aren't Koalas actual bears?

They didn't meet the koalafications!



On the Needles [con't]

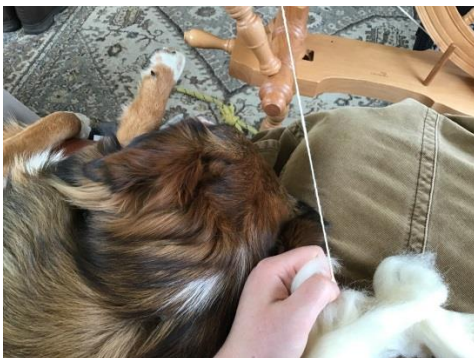
Now comes the math. First figure out the plaid repeat. The design I will use has 82 ends for one repeat. At 8 ends per inch a full repeat takes 10.25 inches. I can get almost 4 full repeats if I widen the width to 40 inches and it will give me a little wiggle room just in case it shrinks more than I think it will.

Next we figure out the yards of yarn needed for the warp. The formula for figuring out yardage of warp is **width of project x sett x length of project = warp yardage**. So putting in the numbers I get 40 inches x 8 ends per inch x 153 inches (4.25 yards). This works out to 48,960 inches or 4,080 feet or 1,360 yards of yarn.

Now we calculate the weft yardage. The formula is **warp + 10%**. So that works out to 1,496 yards.

Added together that comes out to 2856 yards of yarn. If my skeins average 110 yards that means I'll need 26 skeins of yarn. Average weight of a yard of the yarn is 0.0015 lb/yard so I'll use about 4.25 lbs of roving.

The next hurdle is to figure out how much of each color to dye. Stay tuned for updates on how things are going.



Lad's Barking News



This past week my girl went away and I got to teach Mom how to take care of my sheep. She let our old Sabby out of the pen to eat her grain and then went to feed the other girls. She forgot to leave the gate open for me to guard. I guess she doesn't know how good I am at that.

Then she fed the horse and her pets and filled water tanks. When she tried putting Sabby back in with the others to eat her hay, she wasn't very good at making her do what she was told. I tried teaching her but she doesn't know how to work with me. She finally got her back into the pen. Phew that was painful.

Over the week she figured out how to get things done. She still didn't have me guard the gate but my girl knows I can do that so it was okay.

At the end of the week, I got to go for a car ride and we found my girl in a really strange place, with strange birds that made a lot of noise. It was sooo good to see her again. I think she was happy to see me too. She gave me lots of hugs and nice scratches before we got back in the car and headed home.

Now things are back to normal again. It is nice to sleep by her bed at night and get good cuddles before I start my day. She understands that I can help her in the barn too. Life is good again. I'm glad she's home. I missed her.

The Harvest

It is time to start planting the early spring plants. The biggest spring planting this year will be planting cover crops in the area of the pasture that got flooded last spring. The flood brought down 1-18 inches of sand. The grass did a good job growing back through the shallow sand deposit but some areas the sand is just too deep. So I'm going to put a cover crop in that area to not only smother the weed seeds in the sand but also to help rebuild the soil. I also like to plant places around the farm where the wildlife can get access to food and shelter.

Since this is my first time planting an area that the sheep will potentially graze I'm experimenting. I'm not sure what they will eat without it being harvested, so it will be interesting to see this summer or fall. With that in mind I've made a crazy mix recipe of plants which includes: sunflowers; forage turnips; field peas; alfalfa; clover; corn; wheat; and pumpkins.

Sunflowers have deep tap roots that bring up minerals and make them accessible to other plants. During the summer their pollen is a valuable source of food for bees and other pollinators. During the summer their stalks provide a resting place for the wild birds and the fall and winter their seeds are a valuable source of food for them. I'm not sure the sheep will eat the flower since they are out of reach and the sheep don't really like the seeds. That's okay though the birds will enjoy them.

Forage turnips are great fall and early winter feed for the sheep. The greens hold a large amount vitamin A and the

turnips are high in protein. Forage turnips grow more above ground than their garden cousins making it easier for the sheep to pull them up. I've never tried to feed turnips to the sheep so we'll see what they think of this strange food. Hopefully they will make good use of it.

Field peas are nitrogen fixers. The peas will feed the other plants essentially fertilizer and the extra will be safely stored into the soil. These the sheep love. They like every part of the plant and will happily up root it and chow down. I'm also looking forward to some fresh green peas (the only way peas are edible).

Alfalfa and clover are also nitrogen fixers. Both these have pretty flowers, the alfalfa purple and the clover bright red. They both will flower all summer long which provides a long term food source for pollinators. Both of these are shorter plants that will fill in between the other plants and provide a ground cover. This is important because the sand doesn't hold water very well. By providing a living cover over the sand I can reduce the evaporation and reduce the need for me to irrigate. The sheep love these two plants and they are very high in protein. When fed in moderation with other feeds they make excellent food for growing lambs.

Corn is an experiment. I've read of people feeding their sheep corn on the cob and sheep pulling cobs off the stalks. I really don't know if my ewes will try it or if I'll have to harvest it myself. It will be interesting to see.

Wheat will provide biomass. Even if the sheep don't eat the grain, off the top of the stalks, it is valuable for me to have wheat in the mix. The stalks will break down and help provide organic matter which the sand lacks. Organic matter acts as a sponge and it holds a lot of water. The more I can add to the soil the better off the soil will be. If the sheep don't eat the grain it will provide another nice winter feed for the local wild birds.

Pumpkins are added to the mix purely for the sheep. They love pumpkins and will happily spend hours chewing their way into the center to get the tasty seeds. The seeds are a mild de-wormer as well as being high in protein so they are healthy for the sheep as well as being a tasty treat. I don't know how well the pumpkins will do this planned jungle but for the sheep I'm going to try.

My hope is with this mix of plants the soil will start to rebuild and after a while I can replant this back to pasture which will do even better than before because of all the soil building I'm putting into it.



Vaccinations and Sheep

On the calendar is Pre-lambing vaccinations for Ewes and I thought I'd talk a little about why we vaccinate and what vaccinations we give to our sheep.

There is a lot of misinformation out there about why farmers give vaccines and when we give them. Also vaccines are confused with antibiotics. Vaccines cost time and money so the farmer isn't going to give anymore shots than necessary or give them more often than necessary. We invest our time and money as preventative measure to prevent the ewes and lambs from getting deadly diseases. By keeping them healthy in the first place we prevent not only massive antibiotic use but also suffering and death.

Here on MaeBe Farm there is one routine vaccination given called the CD-T shot. The CD part stands for Clostridium Perfringens types C and D, and the T stands for Tetanus. These three diseases are found in the soil and are extremely common everywhere. Clostridium Perfringens is found all over North American and some of Europe. Tetanus is found all over the world. All three of these disease cause horrible deaths but are easily preventable with a simple vaccination.

Type C causes hemorrhagic enteritis which is commonly called "bloody diarrhea". The infection of the small intestine commonly happens in the first few weeks of life but sometimes happens later in life. The only way to protect the newborn lambs is by passive immunity passed from the ewe to the baby through the colostrum.

Type D is what is commonly called over eating disease or pulpy kidney. This usually effects older lambs that are growing quickly. Digestive upsets cause the bacteria in their guts

to change and the wrong type to proliferate which results in a toxic and often fatal reaction.

The T stands for Tetanus which is commonly known as lock jaw. Tetanus is almost always fatal in sheep, because their jaw locks shut and they have difficulty swallowing and moving. The symptoms are almost always permanent, but the vaccine is highly effective at preventing the disease in the first place.

We vaccinate the ewe 4-6 weeks before the lambs are due. This provides passive immunity to the lamb and is extremely important for the health and well-being of the lamb. Provided the lambs get adequate colostrum, their dams will pass along their antibodies from the vaccination

boosters. The lamb's own immune system isn't fully up and running at birth so it is ineffective to give the vaccination to the lambs at first. Their dam's passed along immunity lasts for about 6 weeks. At that age their immune system has developed enough to produce it's own antibodies and they will receive their own shots.

Once the lambs are 6 weeks old we administer a series of two shots, the first one at about 6 weeks and the second one 4 weeks later. All breeding stock gets an annual booster 4-6 weeks before lambing. The chart below shows how the antibodies levels change over time and why we vaccinate when we do.



Meet the Animals of Mae Be Farm



Miss Congeniality (aka Connie) is a 3 year old purebred natural colored Romney. She got her name when we bought her. Dad lifted her into the truck and she immediately turned around and stomped her foot at him demanding to be let out. Dad said she wasn't very congenial and that's how she got her name. Over the years on Mae Be farm she has gotten friendlier but no less demanding. She is one of the top ewes of the flock and often gets her own way.



Her wool is several shades of grey. It ranges from a dark charcoal around her face to a smoky grey along her back.

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Pruning the orchard

I took over the care of our few apple trees a couple of years ago. They were trees that had been taken out (read pulled up by back hoe) from a test plot and were given to us. Their roots had been pruned down to 4 inches long and their tops had been similarly butchered. Amazingly they all survived and now years later are thriving in a somewhat wild state.

When I first started pruning I was terrified I was going to kill the tree. I saved branches that needed to go and didn't prune enough off others. The next year I got a book from the library and started learning how to prune an apple tree. It actually is pretty simple. You are pruning the tree to encourage the tree to produce fruit, to open up the branches so the sun can reach the inside of the tree, and to proactively take care of any problem branches before they become a problem.

You also don't need a ton of equipment. I mostly use a pair of sharp pruning shearers and maybe a little saw. I also have a basket to put the branches in so I don't have to come back and pick them up later.



I like to start pruning by taking off the low branches and the suckers. I am working on raising the height of the lowest

branches so every year I take a couple of feet off the bottom of the tree and it adds a couple of feet on the top. This is important for several reasons. First it's really hard to walk in an orchard where the trees are all as tall as you. Branches reach out and tangle in your hair. It's hard to rake under the trees. Most importantly there is a fungus of the tree that is spread by water. A water drop hits an infected tree and drops to the ground carrying spores. If the branches are low enough the splash of the drop can land on their leaves and infect a healthy tree. The suckers are the branches that grow at the base of the tree. They just take nutrients from the tree and will never grow fruit so they are always removed.



Once I am done giving the trees an upside down haircut. I walk around the tree looking for any damaged and broken branches. These I remove. I also look for branches that are likely to break in the coming year. These are branches that are growing in a funny shape, have an angle that is too sharp, or are too thin for their length.



Now I look for water sprouts, and branches that are growing downward. Water sprouts are branches that grow straight up from another branch. These will never grow fruit so they go to make room for branches that will grow fruit. Branches that grow downward get a little haircut. I'll prune them back to the nearest branch that is pointing upward at an acceptable angle and see if that will redirect the growth.



Next I remove branches that cross or are growing too close together. This opens up the tree and allows the strongest branches more room to grow.



Meet the Animals of Mae Be Farm (con't)

She has beautiful crimp and she has a very nice hand to her wool. It is my favorite wool of all the sheep here and I always try to keep at least some of her wool to put into a special project.



She is currently expecting her third lamb. Her first two lambs were beautifully pure bred Romney boys with her lovely coloring. This year I bred her to Fred the Merino because my new Romney ram is her sire so she will be having cross bred lambs. I'm excited to see what she produces. They should have stunning fleeces.



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Pruning the orchard (con't)

Finally I trim any branches that are encroaching on my pathways so I don't get slapped in the face as I go to the barn.

After I've taken all the branches that I think need to go, I step back and make one final circle of the tree to see how it looks. I and the rams look forward to the apples this fall.

